CHAPTER V

AUSTRALIA AND SOUTH PACIFIC FORUM:
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The South Pacific as a region emerged in 1947, when the Netherlands, Britain, France, the US, Australia and New Zealand established the South Pacific Commission (SPC). The line that the Commission drew on the Pacific map - stretching from Dutch New Guinea in the west to French Polynesia in the east, and from the kingdom of Tonga in the south to Mariana Islands in the north - has, with minor modifications continued to be the dominant delineator of 'the South Pacific' boundary.1 The regional Commission was established with the motive to promote the economic and social development of the territories occupied by the colonial masters. The colonial masters, while establishing the commission, were also influenced by the trusteeship and 'native welfare' ideas of the time. They were also mindful of the political symbolism of their enterprise. The colonial masters were concerned to create a post-war regional order that suited their interests rather than leaving it to the United Nations.2

The political symbolism and developmental advantages and endeavour of decolonisation were not lost with the formation of the SPC. The Pacific Island countries campaigned for decolonisation and their endeavour was to establish a new organisation which would represent indigenous, rather than colonial masters' interests. The most important institutional expression of this commitment was reflected in the creation of the "South Pacific Forum" (SPF) in 1971.

Beginning modestly as an annual meeting of heads of government of independent and self governing island states (Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Western Samoa, Nauru, Australia and

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New Zealand), it gradually expanded its membership as decolonisation progressed. By 1980, the founding members were joined by six other island states (Niue, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Vanuatu). Now there are sixteen members in the SPF with the addition of the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau.

The SPF, an organization of independent and self-governing countries of the South Pacific, was formed at a meeting in the Wellington, New Zealand in 1971 to strengthen their bond of friendship and co-operation. The meeting was attended by the President of Nauru (Chief Hammer De Roburt), the Prime Minister of New Zealand (Sir Heith Holyoake), Prime Minister of Tonga (Prince Tu'ipelehake), Prime Minister of Fiji (Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara), Prime Minister of Western Samoa (Tapua Tamasese Lealofi IV), Premier of Cook Islands (Albert Henry) and the Australian Minister for External Territories (C.E. Barnes).

The initiative to set up an inter-governmental Forum to discuss political issues that could not be aired in the Commission was taken by the Fiji's Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The Commission categorically laid down that it will not promote any political issue in the Commission's conference. The SPF's genesis is the reflection of regional aspirations of the indigenous island countries. The Island countries' aspiration to determine their own course in economic and social development were also evident in SPF's predecessor organizations i.e., the South Pacific Commission (SPC) and the Pacific Islands Producers' Secretariat which later became Pacific Islands Producers' Association (PIPA).

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Pacific Islands Producers' Association

In 1965, the Pacific Islands Producer Association (PIPA) was established. This was totally an indigenous effort. The PIPA was established through the initiative of Fiji, Western Samoa, the Cook islands, and Niue to develop intra-territorial trade cooperation. Initially concerned with "banana marketing", it widened its trade interest and gradually expanded its scope to cover other agricultural products and all steps in the production and marketing cycle.5 The first meeting of PIPA was held at Apia in 1965, with Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa taking part. The Cook Islands and Niue joined later. With the change in name to PIPA from Pacific Islands Producers' Secretariat, a full time Executive Secretary was employed with headquarters in Suva and Ratu Kamisese Mara became the President of the PIPA.6

Although PIPA achieved very little in terms of its development, it was celebrated in terms of its political symbolism. For example, in his closing speech to the 1971 PIPA conference, Tupua Tamasese said: "this is the strength of our small body. This is an association of islanders, created by islanders and successful only from the efforts of the Islanders".7 The Pacific Islanders did not object to PIPA being subsumed by the Forum secretariat because he regarded them both as speaking the same language.

The idea of an indigenous regional organization came into forefront during the South Pacific conference held at Lae, PNG, in 1965. This is widely known as "Lae Rebellion".8


6 Year Book, n.3, p.287.

7 Greg Fry, n. 1, p. 139.

SPC that ensured dominance by the colonial powers. In this year, a number of island leaders warned to establish their own regional organisation outside the SPC framework. Again the move was initiated under the stewardship of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of the Fijian government. The new moves to change the structure of the SPC and to establish an islanders-run regional organisation reflected the political change that was taking place within the island territories.  

After withdrawing from Sahara, France decided to continue its nuclear testing programmes in the South Pacific region. The atolls of Mururoa and Fangataufa in French Polynesia were chosen as testing sites because these areas belong to the French, uninhabited, situated outside maritime and airline routes, capable of supporting scientific equipment, and relatively distant from populated areas. The French nuclear testing in the South Pacific generated dissatisfaction among the Pacific leaders and led to the growth of an indigenous regional organisation.

The Islanders' interest towards an independent and indigenous regional body can be traced back to the 1960's. For the first time, the islanders' protest against the French nuclear testing through a regional organisation occurred in July 1965. At the Sixth South Pacific conference which was held in Lae, PNG, the delegations of the Cook Islands tried to pass a resolution to ask France, (which was soon to explode a nuclear weapon in their area) to "think twice" and "have pity" on the people of the South Pacific. But the conference did not pass the resolution, because political discussion was restricted. Moreover, other Islands' delegates did not show any salient reaction. The failure to pass the resolution proposed by the Cook Islands delegate was due to two reasons. First, the South Pacific conference was controlled by the metropolitan powers. The Islanders had not gained power in the structure of the South Pacific conference. Second, during that time, all the Islands other than Western Samoa were still colonies. They were mainly preoccupied with their internal problems. Thus, views against French nuclear testing did not get much attention of most of the Island

9 ibid., p. 173.
10 PIM, September, 1962, p. 21.
12 PIM, August 1965, p. 30.
delegates and France continued its nuclear testing programme including the explosion of first atomic bomb in this region at Mururoa atoll in July 1966.

The second islanders' notion to protest against France in the South Pacific conference was presented in September 1970. Since the former protested in the Sixth South Pacific conference in 1965, several changes had occurred in the region. The process of decolonisation began to affect the relationship between the metropolitan countries and the island states. The most notable change was regarding the Chairmanship of the South Pacific Conference which now has to be a representative of the islands instead of a metropolitan commissioner. 13 The French nuclear testing became a priority issue over regional affairs in the islands. 14 All these changes in the later part of the 1960's, formed a background to the meeting of the South Pacific Conference in September 1970.

The main principle underlying the Forum initiatives was "self-determination" in regional affairs. In this regard, the establishment of the Forum represented the culmination of a political process rather than a beginning. The representatives of Pacific Island territories had been involved, since the early 1960's, in a campaign to decolonise the power structure in the existing regional organization, the SPC. 15

Another factor that led to the formation of the SPF was France's decision to have nuclear testing programmes in the South Pacific region. France, for the first time decided to explode their first nuclear device in the Sahara in 1960 and entered into the international nuclear race.

13 Nelson, n.s 11, p. 18.
15 Greg Fry, n.1, pp. 139-42.
The Beginning of Joint Protest

The issue of French nuclear test, was raised at the Seventh South Pacific Conference held at Fiji by Jonati Mavoa, a Fiji delegate, under the agenda item of pollution control. The PNG delegate, Oala Oala - Rarua backed Mavoa's protest with more strong words. The French Commissioner M.H. Nettre expressed his displeasure and urged to stop this discussion. But, the Chairman of the Conference, S.M. Koya, giving it a different colour, said that the discussion was related directly to the economic and social welfare and advancement of the people of the Pacific which, the Canberra Agreement (the agreement took place in 1947 for establishing the SPC) specified and allowed the discussion to continue which led Nettre to walk out from the conference.

The South Pacific Conference in Fiji gained wider support from the island states. Furthermore, this was the first time that political discussion was allowed at the South Pacific conference. The islanders' resolution failed because islanders themselves did not want to destroy the SPC - the only regional organization of that time - which was a vital source of technical aid to the Pacific Island States.

The Island leaders felt the relevance and usefulness for an independent and indigenous regional forum to discuss their common problems. In April 1971, all five independent island states gathered at the PIPA Conference at Nuku'alofa, (Tonga). The leaders agreed to have a summit conference soon and reached a tacit understanding that the meeting would consist of only independent countries, and Ratu Kamisese Mara of Fiji was authorised to hold talk with New Zealand to provide a venue. New Zealand, followed by Australia welcomed the initiative of the island countries and offered to provide required facilities for a future meeting.

17 Fiji Times. 25 September 1970. p.3.
Although, New Zealand and Australia welcomed the Islands countries proposal, they were not immediately ready to take the initiative. The New Zealand government had to be careful because it did not want to upset France. It was afraid that France would misunderstand the conference as an anti-French bloc and disrupt the special consideration of New Zealand's dairy products in the European Common Market, which the United Kingdom is trying to enter into.

On the other hand, the other leading metropolitan power, Australia also misunderstood the political importance of the conference and preferred to improve the SPC rather than attempting to find a new regional organization.¹⁸

Although their continued campaign for change gradually drew out some concessions from the colonial powers, it was evident that by the end of the decade (1960's) there would be no change in the constitutional provisions, what angered the island representatives the most: the ban on 'political' discussion. This was a major determinant of the island leaders' decision to form their own organization.

The principle of self-determination was seen, then, as a prior concern of regional cooperation, and the Forum was the most sophisticated institutional expression of it. To underscore this principle, it was not enough that the proposed organisation overcomes the constraints on political discussions in the SPC or was structured in such a way that there was equality among members. It was also regarded as essential that only sovereign island states, and Australia and New Zealand, be allowed to participate, thus excluding the dependent territories and the other extra-regional powers like France, Britain and the US.

Actually, till their presence in the Wellington meet, the island leaders had not decided whether Australia and New Zealand were to be included in the new forum, even though they invited both countries to the conference. The Island leaders recognized that it might appear

as an unusual step but saw it as a necessary one if they were to maximise their influence in the terms of engagement with these countries, at the same time, to alter the whole balance of the terms of trade.

While the invitation to Australia can be thought of mainly in pragmatic terms, the inclusion of New Zealand was also based on some feelings of close affinity. New Zealand was perceived as having more empathy with the islands region. It had a significant Polynesian population; it had been supportive of islander initiatives to reform the SPC, and some of the island leaders had close personal and educational links with New Zealand. It was also known that New Zealand leaders were interested in exploring new multilateral arrangements for dealing with what was fast becoming a post-colonial South Pacific. Significantly, it was the New Zealand Prime Minister, Sir Keith Holyoake, to whom Ratu Mara approached on behalf of the other Island leaders about hosting the first Forum.19

There were many reasons to include both the countries. First, Island leaders needed the help and guidance of both countries, to achieve the standards the islanders aspired to.

Second, there were close trade relations between both countries and the island states. Third, both countries could help to avoid ethnic confrontation in the South Pacific.

Third, the inclusion of both countries was effective in giving the forum greater diplomatic impact. Though islanders want to establish a new forum of island states only, they knew it would be downgraded on the international scene.

At the Wellington Meet, Nauru launched a proposal to establish a permanent regional organisation with a constitution and a permanent secretariat. Even though other leaders considered, it was premature to try to formalise procedures and have a constitution, they decided to name the body as South Pacific Forum (SPF)20 and fixed that it would meet on an

19 ibid., p. 165.
20 Fiji Times, 5 August 1971. p.5.
annual basis. The islanders' basic contention was not to make the SPF as another South Pacific conference. The Islanders' also agreed to include Australia and New Zealand as founding members of the SPF.

The Forum also clarified the notion of 'region' held by the participants. It did not equate with the territories of the participating states. Rather, the leaders recognized that the territories of the Forum island states formed only a part of the region. The South Pacific, they acknowledged, was the SPC area with its much wider boundaries. Making Forum membership open to any Pacific Island country in the SPC region once it had attained nationhood signified this. Thus it was envisaged that the area under the legal jurisdiction of the Forum members would gradually expand towards outer limits set by SPC boundaries. This notion of 'region' specifically did not include the territories of Australia and New Zealand despite their membership of the organization. This was based on the premise, accepted by Australia and New Zealand, that the cooperative process was there to serve 'developing', rather than developed societies.

The Forum has operated since its inception with no written constitution or international agreement governing its activities and no formal rules relating to its purpose, membership or conduct of meeting. Decisions have always been reached through consensus.21 Objectives and agendas are worked out by officials prior to forum summits. The organization gradually developed a small bureaucracy in its headquarters in Suva, functional offshoots such as the Pacific Forum line, and the Forum Fisheries Agencies, programmes like South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, nuclear weapons free zone proposal, and from 1989, a formal dialogue process with world powers.

The full story of South Pacific regional co-operation cannot, however, be told solely as the history of the Forum in the way one might equate South-East Asian Cooperation with ASEAN, African Cooperation with OAU, and Caribbean Cooperation with Caricom, much

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of the narrative should in fact be concerned with the politics of relations between regional institutions and the political interests they represent. The SPC continued to operate alongside the Forum network, and other intergovernmental institutions have also been established: a regional university is Suva in 1969, the Honolulu-based Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP) in 1980, the Suva-based South Pacific Applied Geo-science Commission (SOPAC) in 1984, the Appa-based South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in 1980, and a co-ordinating body, the SPOCC, which seeks to rationalise the activities of all the bodies, was established in 1988.

The Forum network is, nevertheless, the site of what one might call 'the main game' of regional cooperation. It is through the forum network that the principal integrative schemes have been attempted, that joint political stances have been worked out, and a number of regional legal regimes have been negotiated on arms control, environment protection, resource management and international trade. With its entry qualification of full political sovereignty and regional residence, it is the only South Pacific organisation that represents the collective opinion of the independent states of the region. The Forum, therefore provides the most appropriate institutional focus for a study of the efforts of the past colonial states to promote international as well as regional cooperation over the past two and a half decades. 

Australia in the Forum

All Forum members including Australia and New Zealand share common objective of economic and social progress in conditions of global and regional peace and stability. This fact confers upon Australia very precious benefits, as well as great responsibilities. Through an energetic and imaginative role in the SPF, Australia can preserve those benefits and be responsive to the challenges.

Australia participates and takes the leading role in every contentious issue related to the South Pacific. The Forum discussions cover many topics - from the global political issues of nuclear disarmament, nuclear testing and dumping of nuclear waste to decolonisation of New Caledonia and to matters of functional cooperation among member countries including trade, shipping and fisheries.\(^{23}\)

Over the past years, the Forum countries have defined their particular priorities in information exchange and Australia has prepared papers addressing international political and economic developments affecting regional security.\(^{24}\) Australia, also, on its part, is taking a leading role to revitalise the existing regional institution of the South Pacific. Although, it was not very keen on the PNG proposal related to merger of the SPF and SPC, but it is now looking for the possible modalities so that the FIC demand "to have more say" can be achieved, without harming the extra-regional powers.

The FIC currently involved in the process of reshaping the institutional arrangements serving the South Pacific region. They are concerned with adjusting the existing regional structures to make international co-operation effective. Decisions about the establishment of these institutions, and their membership, control, functions and financing, could all have serious implications for the interests of the various forum members and metropolitan countries involved in existing regional organizations.

The quest for a united regional movement had become prominent because the Pacific Islanders felt that they were being manipulated by much larger and extra-regional powers. It was because they have accepted the political realities created by the colonial masters and have accepted smallness as an excuse for alleviating poverty.


The demand for change in the South Pacific institutional arrangement and the quest for an indigenous and effective regional body had become important for trade and political purposes.

The current institutional framework for regional co-operation is mainly provided by two organisational networks - the South Pacific Commission and the South Pacific Forum. Within each network there is a range of specialist regional institutions linked in various ways to the parent. In the case of Suva-based SPF network, for example, there is the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Forum Shipping Line, various ministerial councils concerned with matters such as trade, Civil Aviation and Shipping, and the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation (SPEC) presently known as the Forum's Secretariat. Each of these institutional network is managed by the Forum members though each has metropolitan country members (Australia and New Zealand) and is primarily financed from this source.

On the other hand, the Noumea-based South Pacific Commission (SPC) covers a wider region through its inclusion of the United States and French dependencies. It also has greater metropolitan involvement through the participation of France, the United States and the United Kingdom, in addition to Australia and New Zealand. Whereas the Forum restricts its membership to the independent South Pacific Countries plus Australia and New Zealand, the SPC is virtually run by the extra-regional powers.

Another important distinction is that the SPC has retained its "no politics" rule whereas any subject may be raised in the Forum. Thus, it is only in the Forum that a joint position can be adopted in relation to the important political issues affecting the region, and that joint approaches can be made to countries and organizations outside the region. Also, the regional ventures requiring a considerable commitment of national resources and a surrendering of national sovereignty have all been pursued through the Forum network.

Although, the most visible manifestation of South Pacific regionalism since the post-war period is the growth of regional inter-governmental organizations but, disputes between
Australia and Indonesia, New Zealand and the United States, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, Tonga and Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Island, and the US and Western Samoa are legacies of the colonial past. The South Pacific Island States metropolitan and outside powers are also apprehensive of being dominated by metropolitan and outside powers through regional organisations. A successful working of the inter-governmental organization have been prejudiced to some extent by certain latent cleavages. When Fiji was chosen the headquarters of SPF, or when Fiji was chosen as a place for locating the University of the South Pacific or for the offices of international bodies, there were complaints by some members that Fiji is getting the lion's share as a result of the South Pacific regionalism. Fiji's Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was suspected of arrogating to himself the role of natural leader of the SPF and spokesman for the South Pacific at the international level.

Secondly there is a disparity between the small states and the large states. The small states relies more on the inter-governmental organisation to bestow nominal equality of status and influence in regional affairs, and to attract foreign aid and technical assistance. The SPF secretariat, whose secretary has usually been a man from a small state has been a source of considerable support. The small states tend to turn to larger outside powers, very often to the former colonial powers, for assistance. In contrast, the larger states, possessing natural resources and some industry, assumes a more self-sufficient nationalistic posture, to which the inter-governmental organizations are adjuncts rather than essential, and sometimes a nuisance.

The third reason for cleavages is overlapping division between the Polynesian and the Melanesian areas. Some Polynesian states like Western Samoa, after gaining early independence are assertive of Polynesian identity. It has been advocating an economic entente with Tonga, and Cook Islands. In contrast, the Melanesian states, have been asserting a critical, anti-colonial, pro-third world doctrine which sometimes called Melanesian Socialism. The Melanesian states asserted their collective identity by forming the Melanesian
Spearhead Group (MSG) in 1986, while the Polynesian governments responded with the idea of a Polynesian Economic and Cultural Community.

Fourth, the Island governments distinguished themselves not only from the extra-regional powers of France, Britain and the United States but also from the inter-regional metropolitan governments of Australia and New Zealand. The Melanesians, and Fiji in particular since 1987, suspected Australia at harbouring leadership ambitions not sufficiently sensitive to island interests. At the Port Vila Forum in 1990, for example, the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke's support of US chemical-weapons destruction on Johnston Atoll provoked suggestion that the Forum members should caucus apart from the two metropolitan powers.

Fifth, the independent island states distinguish themselves from the territories, which are still dependencies. They have experienced different colonial systems and have developed certain complex regarding their society and culture. This is also a cause of cleavages amongst the countries of the South Pacific. Proposals have come to dilute SPC and SPF and establish SRO. With an objective to have a single forum for regional cooperation. When the SPF set up the South Pacific Organisations Coordinating Committee (SPOCC) in 1988, it strongly supported the proposed new institutional arrangements drawn up by the Committee on Regional Institutional Arrangement (CRIA) after extensive consultation with interested non-forum governments and organisation. The confrontation in the SPOCC meetings was avoided by compromises entailing a rotating chair, a rotating secretariat and a rotating venue to conduct its summit meetings.

Because of these short-comings which hinders the path of a "Pacific-way of Life" where decisions are made by consensus and tolerance, the sub-regional groupings have not dominated either in the SPC or the SPF. Even, the outside powers have not taken seriously to these organisations. The extra-regional powers and the island countries have accepted the

importance of the regional organisations. Recently, attention has been given to problems of overlapping functions, administrative rivalries, featherbedding, and inefficiency that allegedly beset the bureaucracies of the SPC and the Forum Secretariat.

The proposals for institutional change before the Pacific leaders also reflect political developments in the region and have significantly affected the relations among Island States and between Island States and metropolitan countries.

The extra-regional powers started viewing the outcomes of the SPF deliberations as holding implications for their strategies. The SPF for the Islanders came increasingly to be seen as a forum where the governing norms and principles of regional order, as a prevailing pattern of state practice, were being determined.

The institutional framework in which regional negotiations took place became much more complicated in due course. After a decade of dispute concerning the desirability of rationalising a decentralised institutional network into a "Single Regional Organization", which was promoted by the PNG, the protagonists settled on a compromise of closer cooperation under the umbrella of SPOCC. This satisfied the independent states because it increased the Forum's power: three of the six agencies within SPOCC were part of the Forum network and Forum Secretariat became the Secretariat of the SPOCC. In this sense the Forum became the head of the new network. It satisfied those such as the territorial administrations, and France and the United States, who saw SPC membership as legitimising their participation in South Pacific regional affairs and who feared that they might not have a seat at the table if there was only one regional organization. None the less, bickering between the SPC and the Forum over who should have control over the regional programme, an established ritual of regional politics, continued as before.26

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The proposals aired in the South Pacific region for revamping the regional institutions is still relevant. The demand for SRO, although has not received a concrete shape, but getting support from most of the Island States. Therefore, in future, the merger of the regional organizations can not be ruled out. It is pertinent to mention that several proposals have been put forward for integration of the regional association. Some countries have proposed with the creation of a 'political alliance' for the independent island states. Another involves the merger of the two existing regional institutions, the SPC and the SPF. And other one is the formation of a regional peace keeping force, to maintain peace and stability.27

The proposal for a political alliance of the independent Pacific Island states first arose as a PNG initiative at the Twentieth South Pacific Conference held in Port Moresby in October 1980.28 The Papua New Guinea Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister, Mr. Noel Levi, argued that the regional needed a 'political alliance such as the Organisation of African Unity to make its opinions known in the forums of the world'. He suggested that such an alliance could 'speak with one voice' on issues of regional concern such as nuclear testing, the dumping of nuclear wastes and decolonisation. The head of the PNG delegation, the Minister for Primary Industry, Mr. Roy Evara, said that this body could seek observer status at the United Nations and in other international organisations.29 But it was not intended whether the existing regional organisation will be replaced or not. Rather, he felt, the alliance would work along with these organisations and receive administrative support from their secretariats.

The symbolic significance of such a move should not be underestimated. A political alliance would demonstrate to the world, and particularly to other parts of the Third World, that the Pacific Island states determine their own regional positions on matters of concern to

28 Address by the Honourable W. Noel Levi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and address by the Honorable Minister for Primary Industry, Mr. Roy Evara, *Twentieth South Pacific Conference*, Port Moresby, 18-24 October 1980.
29 ibid., 287.
them and are not subject to visible metropolitan influence. It will not be surprising if the call for such an organisation come. Because the South Pacific Island States constitute the only Third World region that does not exclude developed countries from its regional organisations. Even the Caribbean, a comparable region of developing island micro states, excludes metropolitan countries from its regional institutions. The initiative also needs to be viewed against the changes made to South Pacific regional organisations over the last 25 years. These changes have all been in the direction of giving the Pacific Island states greater control over the regional structures operating in their region.

But why a political alliance? Part of the answer may lie in the influence of the PNG Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr. Paulias Matane. On his return from the United Nations in August 1980, Mr. Matane drew attention to the need for a South Pacific organisation to have observer status at the UN similar to that enjoyed by the OAU and the Arab League. He argued that this would enable the Pacific states to be more vocal on matters affecting their region. Although he did not specifically mention a 'political alliance' but the similarities are obvious.

Most Pacific Island leaders would readily agree that the FIC need to take steps to make themselves better heard by the world community. This was emphasised, for example, by a number of leaders attending the Pacific Islands conference on 'Development the Pacific Way' held in Honolulu in March 1980. But this does not mean that the 'political alliance' formula would be regarded as an appropriate means of achieving this. This creation of yet another regional organisation, following the establishment of the Hawaiii-based Pacific Islands Development Programme, is likely to be unacceptable to the Pacific states. This is particularly the case coming at a time when Pacific leaders have complained of the duplication in existing regional agencies. It is therefore more likely that they would rather see the SPF expanding its activities and involvement outside the region.

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A second objection to PNG's proposal that is likely to be in the minds of the other Pacific leaders, concerns the exclusion of Australia and New Zealand. In the past, the Island countries have considered it an advantage to have this metropolitan presence. Their participation gives the South Pacific states an opportunity to confront, or to talk informally with, these countries. Moreover, the Island states can confront the developed countries in a situation where the former hold the numbers. It is evident that the Pacific states had something like this in mind when they invited Australia and New Zealand to join the Forum. In his address to the UN General Assembly in October 1976 the Fijian Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, said that the SPF had made a 'significant impact' because it includes representatives of developed and developing nations, working together side by side, to determine policies which take account of the needs and aspirations of all. That is not to say that such policies can always be determined and agreed. There can be hard words and hard bargaining. There can be deadlock. But at least there is the continuing opportunity for dialogue and for all to put their viewpoint. 32

Again, Mara felt that the activities of some other groupings which confine their membership to those of like philosophies, politics and persuasions, and at like stages of development were quiet different. From such bodies, usually one hears numbers of pronouncements on world problems and issues: and yet such declarations tend not to result in successful execution. 33

On balance, however, it is unlikely that the Pacific leaders will opt for the 'political alliance' proposal. They are more likely to try to strengthen and expand the Forum's contacts with the outside world. It could also involve some adjustment of the Forum structure and procedure such that Pacific Island leaders meet at times without Australia and New Zealand being present. This could take the form of a separate Island state caucus that would meet

32 ibid., p. 289.
33 ibid., p. 289.
before Forum meetings or of special Forum meetings in which only Island states would participate.

The 'SPC/SPF Merger' Proposal

A proposal enjoying wider support among the Pacific Island states is that to merge the two existing regional institutions, the SPC and the SPF. Support for such a move stems both from a concern with the overlap and duplication in the existing regional system and from a belief that the Forum should replace the SPC because it more legitimately represents the interests of Pacific Islanders. The first practical steps were taken when the 1979 South Pacific Conference (of the SPC) established a joint committee to examine the possibilities. Mr. Karanita Enari of Western Samoa chaired the committee, comprising representatives of three countries from each organisation. The Enari Report recommended a merger of the two regional bodies. Its proposals were considered during 1980s, first by the Conference and then by the Forum, but both decided to defer action on the matter. The merger proposal although was not outrightly rejected but it seems that it is not going to implemented in the near future. Because, Australia and New Zealand along with some extra-regional powers are not keen on such type of proposals.

In the circumstances, this reluctance to act on the Committee's recommendations is understandable. There is much more involved than overcoming the practical problems of merging the secretariats and activities of the two organisations. The real stumbling blocks are the questions of membership and control. There would be no problem if all Pacific Island countries were independent. They would all then be in a position to join the Forum, and the SPC could be terminated. But this is not the case. The fact that the United States and France continue to have dependencies in the region leads them to believe they have the right to be involved in any comprehensive regional organisation.

34 ibid., p. 290.
This situation is further complicated by the fact that several of these dependencies do not want to take the step to full independence; they prefer, for pragmatic reasons, to remain as self-governing dependencies. As the indigenous leaders do not intend to press for complete independence, and as they view their present constitutional situation as effectively one of self-government, or close to it, they want to have a position in the regional organisations equal to that of the independent Pacific countries. However, their aspirations have come up against the attitudes of the independent countries. Most of the independent states do not regard the political changes within the territories as sufficient to satisfy the qualification of independence for entry to the Forum. For countries such as PNG and Fiji, the admittance to the Forum of countries which are not fully responsible for their own affairs represents a retrograde step. It would open up the indigenous regional movement to influence from metropolitan powers. This was what the independent countries were trying to move away from when they established the SPF.

Barred from access to the Forum, the dependent territories and metropolitan powers can only pursue their interests through the SPC. It is therefore understandable that they have become the organisation's most ardent supporters. The independent Pacific countries, on the other hand, whilst members of both the SPC and the Forum, feel their primary commitment to the Forum. They value the independence of this organisation. Thus for each group there are dangers involved in a merger of the SPC and SPF. The metropolitan powers and dependent territories would be concerned lest their influence and access be subordinated to the independent Pacific countries or even be eliminated altogether. For the independent Pacific Islands, the concern would be to safeguard indigenous control of regional decision-making.

The Enari Report does not adequately deal with these political realities. It glosses over the all-important question of who would control the new organisation. The proposed structure allows for retention of the Forum, with the South Pacific Conference as a co-equal partner at the top of the structure. The relations between these two bodies and the relative influence of each are not considered. Both bodies are to be serviced by the Secretariat as is
the case in the SPC and the Forum? Whose Will would prevail? Such an arrangement would obviously be anathema both to the metropolitan powers and dependent territories involved in the proposed conference and to the independent Pacific countries involved in the proposed heads of government meeting. Although the Enari Report attempts to combine the best elements of each organisation, by doing so it introduces two irreconcilable elements. It is understandable then that neither the SPC nor the SPF were attracted to the proposal in its present form.

But even if the Enari Report had addressed the central problem of who is to control the proposed organisation, it is difficult to imagine an arrangement which would suit all parties. A proposal which involved equal power (or even a significant degree of influence) being given to France, Britain and the United States and to dependent territories would be unacceptable to the independent Forum States. They would see this as a backward step from an organisation (the Forum) which they fully control. On the other hand, a proposal that gave the metropolitan powers and dependent territories a subsidiary role, or which left out the metropolitan powers altogether, would not gain the support of such groups. They would prefer to stick with the SPC. This therefore amounts to a stalemate.

The 1979 Forum considered that 'this question should resolve itself as more Pacific countries joined the Forum'. What is meant by this is that as the remaining territories move to independence and thereby qualify for Forum membership, the justification for supporting the SPC for metropolitan and dependency interests would no longer exist. But this is unrealistic. Although a few territories - the Micronesian group - are expected to move to a political status which would qualify them for Forum membership, this will still leave a significant number of French and American territories which will not become independent in the foreseeable future and which will still demand to be part of any major regional institution. The other problem with this 'solution' is that several of the independent Pacific Island states see value in having two organisations. They see the South Pacific Conference as performing a useful consultative function. This would be lost if a merger occurred on the only terms likely to appeal to most of the independent Pacific Island states. Those terms are that metropolitan countries, other than Australia dependent territories not be part of the
governing body of the organisation. The merger proposal has only got the approval of the Melanesian spearhead group. Individually, the PNG is very much keen for a quick merger because it envisages important role for her in that dispensation.

The 'Regional Peacekeeping Force' Proposal:

Papua New Guinea's experience with sending troops to assist the Lini government put down the rebellion in Santo prompted Prime Minister Chan to propose the creation of a Regional Peacekeeping Force to meet similar situations in the future. He first made this suggestion in September 1980 whilst visiting Vanuatu after the rebellion had been suppressed. At the time, Vanuatu gave its support to Chan's suggestion. The other Pacific Island states, however, are yet to make clear their position on the issue. The necessity of a Peace Keeping Force once again felt after the offshoot of Bougainville crisis.

What is envisaged is a force drawn from Forum member countries that could act to assist a 'legitimate government' in the region to resist threats to its security. This proposal is fraught with difficulties. But, despite difficulties, South Pacific Peace Keeping Force has come up in 1994 and all the Forum members including Australia have agreed to provide financial support.

The first problem concerns the composition of such a force. There are only two island countries which have armies of sufficient size to contribute to a regional force. They are Papua New Guinea, with a defence force of around 3750, and Fiji, with a force of around 1420. Tonga's 100-strong army is really too small to perform more than a ceremonial and bodyguard function, whilst members of Vanuatu's small mobile guard are only now undergoing initial training in Papua New Guinea. The other Pacific Island countries do not have armies. Clearly, then, a regional force would effectively be a Papua New Guinea/Fiji force. Herein lies the problem. It is very unlikely that Fiji would want to be part of a regional force, particularly one which Papua New Guinea, with its greater resources, would
dominate. Fiji has been a keen supporter of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force and strongly opposed PNG's unilateral action in Vanuatu.

It has not been indicated whether Australia and New Zealand would be asked to join a regional force. The Vanuatu's experience suggests that at least some technical, tactical and transport back-up would be expected and required. Australia and New Zealand would, however, be very unwilling to enter such a commitment. It could obviously appear very badly for them if a regional force, apparently led by them in view of their resources and size, was seen to be suppressing or even killing Pacific Islanders involved in an internal political struggle.

A second problem concerns the situations in which such a force could act. It would obviously be unable to counter an invasion of an island state by a country outside the region. This would be beyond its capacity. This leaves three other possibilities. The first is a purely internal rebellion or civil war, which threatens the authority of a 'legitimate' government. This would most likely take the form of a separatist or secessionist movement in one of the Melanesian states. Whilst a regional force may have the capacity to act in such a situation there would be political obstacles. There could be problems with a PNG/Fiji force seen to be intervening in domestic political struggles particularly if the position proved intractable and a guerrilla was developed.

Another scenario is an internal rebellion fuelled and manipulated by outside interests. In this case there could be similar problems to those associated with a purely internal rebellion, but intervention would be easier to justify. The Santo rebellion would fall into this category. The main problem is that there is unlikely to be any other situation quite like Santo, either in terms of the nature of the rebellion itself or in terms of the ease with which the PNG troops were able to suppress it.

A third possibility would be an outside non-government force or group, establishing claim to an uninhabited island or reef within the jurisdiction of a Forum member country.
This would be a situation in which a regional force could act effectively and without fear of a backlash in public opinion. But this would be likely to occur so rarely, if at all, that the formation of a standing regional force would be inappropriate. This proposal was gaining acceptance because in the Rarotonga Forum Meet in 1987, for assisting Peace Process in Bougainville issue has already established the South Pacific Peace-Keeping Force for Bougainville (SPPKF). Therefore, in future, it may work for the whole of the region.

The Single Regional Organisation (SRO) Move and SPOCC

The mid-1980's has witnessed a period when PNG and France shook hands on a compromise to the long-standing political tension in regional politics - the question of a Single Regional Organisation (SRO). PNG promotion to such an organisation had already been seen as threatening to those who did not have Forum membership because they saw the SRO concept as possibly involving an inner and outer circle of membership. They would therefore lose the legitimacy afforded to full participation in the SPC. Australia along with New Zealand also did not agree in toto to the proposal of merger of the SPC and the SPF. Rather, they were interested to work out a mid-way to overcome the deadlock.

However, the 14th Forum meet on August 30, 1983 which took place in Canberra discussed the question of a SRO and adopted certain resolutions. The Forum, while recognising that a SRO to be effective and meet the need of the region, should:

(i) have the basic goal of furthering the objective of the Forum countries in assessing all the FIC's and territories in the development efforts, either individually or collectivity;

(ii) ensure the continued participation and contributions of those developed countries, including those outside the region, who have to date played an important role in assisting regional development, on the basis of mutual respect and constructive

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35 Greg Fry, n. 6, p. 180.
partnership among the Forum countries, the Island territories and the metropolitan countries;

(iii) recognise the position of the Forum as the supreme authority on issues of regional concern;

(iv) be more cost effective in the long run than existing arrangements;

(v) maintain close relations with other regional institutions and organisations and with international agencies operating within the region, channelling wherever possible their activities through the Single Regional Organisation, with a view to developing greater co-ordination of their activities to the benefit of regional countries.36

The Forum also agreed that greater emphasis should be given towards attaining the objective of a SRO for the Pacific with a view to establishing in the region a new and lasting relationship among developed and developing countries and territories to promote regional development; It decided to appoint a Committee of Ministers of Foreign Affairs from four countries to:

a) consider the political, legal, constitutional and financial implications of a Single Organisation;

b) undertake consultations with the governments of France, USA and the United Kingdom, as well as those Island territories not members of the Forum and SPEC, to inform them of the Forum's views and to ascertain from them their views on their participation in the Single Regional Organisation; and

c) recommend to the Fifteenth South Pacific Forum a set of proposals on the Single Regional Organisation based on the foregoing.\textsuperscript{37}

The Forum resolution requested R.J. Hawke, (the Prime Minister of Australia), Chairman of the Fourteenth South Pacific Forum to convey to the governments of France, the USA and the United Kingdom as well as their Pacific territories the Forum's decision to initiate consultations with them on a Single Regional Organisation.

Decided that funding for the Committee be arranged by SPEC through the Short Term Advisory Services Project. Australia undertook to provide financial assistance. The composition of the Committee would be finalised after consultation with the member states.

The basic impulse which lay behind the various proposals put forward by the PNG Government was a growing dissatisfaction with the existing international order in the South Pacific, and a desire for change in the interests of island countries. The same impulse lies behind the government's continued advocacy of a SRO to replace the SPC and the Forum Secretariat. The impression given in the proposals put forward by the PNG's Secretary, Foreign Affairs and Trade is for a 'new Pacific order'.\textsuperscript{38}

Another factor which has led to the demand to have a SRO is the shortage of adequate funds for the development of the region. Maximum funds and financial aids that are available are being grabbed by the available regional institutions and its auxiliary agencies. A study by an academician from an Island country has also confirmed that half of the funds received by the SPC and more than seventy percent of those received by the Forum Secretariat are spent on "salaries and other staff related benefits".\textsuperscript{39} Not only that, the

\textsuperscript{37} ibid., p. 411.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{AFAR}, Vol. 63, No. 8, 1983, p. 415.

\textsuperscript{39} ibid.
functioning of the regional organisations also overlaps frequently. This led the PNG government to press for a SRO.

The frustration on the part of some island countries to rearrange the existing institutional arrangement is due to the most significant inequalities in the region between the developed and metropolitan countries (that is Australia and New Zealand) on the one hand, and the developing and tiny island countries on the other.

But, Australia and New Zealand do not agree with the idea of SRO. They categorically said that there is no need of merger or creation of a new organisation. Rather, what requires is successful functioning of these regional bodies. Australia accepted the existence of inequalities in terms of economic growth and per capita income, between the metropolitan and island states. But retreated its keenness to work for the development of the island states with the help of the regional organisations.

The relative openness and generosity which the Australia and New Zealand government have displayed in dealing with island countries, especially in their capacity as aid donors, have been widely applauded by the island leaders. The FIC States does not have serious objections towards the Australian policies in the South Pacific. Only possible problematic area is, the tiny Island countries sometimes feel that Australia is very much interested to pose itself as the leader of the South Pacific region.

With regard to the proposals of institutional rearrangement could not get much attention due to the sharp division of opinion among the island states and the opposition by the metropolitan powers. Rather, expecting discontent among the island states over the regional organisations functioning, as a compromise the Australian government with the help of some island countries spearheaded the move to establish SPOCC which came into being in 1988 after a series of negotiations. That organisation is working smoothly in the South Pacific region.
The SPF meets also decided that the issue of a Single Regional Organisation should continue to be a matter of its attention as there was a need for some kind of rationalisation in the regional organisations in the Pacific and thus, established a Committee on Regional Institutional Arrangements (CRIA).40

The CRIA, where the FIC including Australia and New Zealand were members discussed the issue extensively. Australia showed its uneasiness towards the merger formula and told the members that decision of that kind will affect the inflow of aid and financial assistance from the extra-territorial powers.

The CRIA's report was strongly supported by the 19th Forum meet in Nuku alofa, Tonga in 1988. The proposals of the CRIA after extensive consultations with interested non-forum governments and organisations.

The "South Pacific Organisations Co-ordination Committee" (SPOCC) was established in 1988. The SPF also agreed to strengthen the political and economic capacities of the Forum Secretariat. At the same time, the Forum Secretariat was also directed to monitor the implementation of the regional institutional arrangements and to report as necessary to the Forum.41

This satisfied the independent states because it increased the Forum's power: three of the six agencies with in SPOCC were part of the Forum network and the Forum Secretariat became the Secretariat of the new SPOCC.42 The focus of this network is the annual meeting of the SPOCC, with which the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the South Pacific Applied Geo Science Commission (SOPAC), the Pacific Islands Development Programme (PIDP), the Tourism Council of the South Pacific (TCSP), the University of South Pacific (USP) and the South

Pacific Commission (SPC), as well as the Forum Secretariat are attached. The SPOCC was assigned the top task of co-ordinating and ensuring development of the existing agencies in the South Pacific region. Australia and New Zealand authorized charged SPOCC to study and make recommendations on a rational division of labour between the seven principal regional inter-governmental organisations and postponement of the demand for the establishment of a SRO for the time being.

The initiative has been judged successfully in defusing clashes between powerful personalities and between conservative and radical states and easing apprehension of poor states that their aid would continue to flow. Dropping the demand of CRIA was sufficient to gain the confidence of outside donors to extend its economic assistance throughout the region. The current conception about SPOCC is one of a South Pacific wheel with the established regional organisations seen as seven spokes rotating smoothly its hub.  

The acceptance of SPOCC by the island states as a compromise between the alternatives of a move to SRO, on the one hand, or continued lack of coordination, on the other, has provided immediate solution to the long-standing demand for SRO. The decentralised but coordinated network of regional agencies in place by the end at 1980s provided focus and commitment in particular issue areas and allowed several island capitals to enjoy the benefits of hosting a regional institution, a departure from the Suva - and Noumea centred regionalism of the 1970's.

The debate still continues among the academicians, politicians and intellectuals on the efficacy of establishing a SRO. However, the SPF countries decided against it for the time being. SPOCC has been established to co-ordinate the working of various regional institutions.  

43 Hoadley, n. 9, p. 70.

The growing discontentment on the part of the PNG and some other island states on the functioning of the regional organisations received moral victory when the decision came out on the salaries and benefits offered by the Forum Secretariat and other agencies. The salaries and other benefits by the SPF Secretariat have decided to be slashed by as much as 25 percent. Funded by the New Zealand government, the author of the report, Doug Ruhen, of management consultants Deloitte, Touche and Tohmatsu, argued that most of the seven regional organisations under the umbrella of SPOCC overpay their staff by as much as 35 percent.45

For instance, the head of one regional organisation receives a tax-free package of US$ 120,000 a year. The consultant wants this to be reduced, arguing that similar jobs in Australia and New Zealand could be done at two-thirds the cost.

Various regional agencies and countries criticised the reduction in pay package. What baffled them was though in the mid-1980s, Australia and New Zealand had instigated moves to bolster salary packages offered by the Forum Secretary, why were they reacting now, especially when their nationals dominate the staff of the organisation numerically. The simple answer which comes to the mind is, Australia is more interested to spend lump sum amount for the development of the South Pacific economy. The reduction in salary package is one of the immediate solution towards that goal. Australia, along with New Zealand and some Pacific Island countries feel, time is not yet ripe to revamp the regional structures of the South Pacific.

45 ibid.